

# Lasting consequences of brief encounters

by **Raymond J Skinner**

Climb up lonely Birkdale from Kirkby Stephen, past the tarn to where the Sleddale Beck meets Whitsundale Beck; here, the two moorland streams merge to become the infant river Swale, and the traveller is at the head of perhaps Yorkshire's most beautiful dale - the late James Herriot, vet turned celebrated author, puts it even more strongly when he describes Swaledale as "the most beautiful part of England".

Near here, this story, which may be described as one of chance encounters, begins...

In the last year of the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth, from the tiny hamlet of Angram, opposite Kisdon Hill, came Rosamund Shawe to wed William Whitelock, a yeoman farmer of Topcliffe in the more fertile agricultural reaches of the lower dale. Angram, with its even higher neighbour, Keld, is near to the western boundary of North Yorkshire's second-largest parish, Grinton-in-Swaledale. The tale is perhaps well known of how, until 1580, coffins had to be carried in wicker baskets by relays of men down the Corpse Way, from the head of the valley about 12 miles to Grinton, before the dead could be interred in consecrated ground. Rosamund, however, passed this way on a more pleasant errand to wed her William, almost 50 miles away - one wonders how, in 1603, they even came to meet at all, for normally the nearest market town was the extreme of travel for such ordinary folk.

In later times, a church and burial ground were opened at Muker, lower down the dale, and the churchyard contains burials of other Whitelocks who lived along the fellsides and in the minor dales between. They intermarried with other widespread local names - Aldersons and Knowles - and their graves look out from the churchyard towards the stone walls and barns so typical of the dales.

Like other travellers before us, we followed the road down the dale, through Gunnerside, Reeth, and finally Grinton, where we stopped at the Bridge Inn, opposite the church. Near here, at Harkerside, was once Swale Hall, the seat of Sir Solomon Swale. He, according to Defoe:

*had the vanity, as I have heard, to boast that his family was so ancient as not to receive their name from, but to give the name to the river itself.*

There is some confusion as to which baronet, the first or third, this story refers. The editor of the latest edition of Defoe's *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* opts for the third baronet (1665-1733), who gambled away most of his estate; local tradition, however, seems to prefer the first (c1609-1678), who died in London's Fleet Prison after many lawsuits. The Swales are commemorated in Grinton Church by the following tablet, on the wall of the north aisle:

*To the Glory of God and in memory of the family of Swale, of Swale Hall, Grinton 1138-1733. The family was founded by Alured de Swale, nephew of Walter de Gaunt, a kinsman of William the Conqueror.*

A conversation with the landlady of the inn soon prompted the information that she had accommodated two visitors from New Zealand only a few years before - they were, it appeared, Whitelock descendants of the family who once owned nearby Cogden Hall and who had been extensive landowners around Grinton in the 19th century. This was a name in which I had considerable interest, for my own Whitelock ancestors had lived in nearby Wensleydale at much the same period. The often fruitless, but always interesting, attempts to link different family groups with the same patronym can while away many a winter's evening.

Leaving the pub, we drove about a mile down the road to find

Cogden Hall in its meadows which rise gradually behind to the moor. The large 18th century house appeared to have changed little from its appearance when first built; it is situated beside Cogden Beck, which descends from the hillside where stand the remains of a smelt mill, built by the London Lead Company in about 1840 when Matthew Whitelock lived in the house. The whole of the side valley is marked with remains of efforts to unearth the lead seams by the process known as "hushing" - a beck or stream would be dammed to a considerable height and the water then released. The resultant scouring action of the stream would uncover any evidence of the presence of the sought-after material. Lead mining declined, however, with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, due mainly to continental competition. Many of the unemployed miners went north to Durham to look for other work and to use their expertise in the developing coal-fields of the north-east. Such migration partly accounts for the many inherently Yorkshire surnames now found in Cleveland and Tyneside.

Our landlady at the Bridge Inn had kindly leafed through her register to find for us the address of the New Zealand Whitelocks who had stayed with her and, on our return home to Wiltshire, we wrote to John Matthew Whitelock and his wife, Lyndall. However, as perversely happens, John had just left on a business trip before our letter arrived in North Island. A dutiful daughter promptly communicated its contents to her father. Where was he? ...in London, of course! John soon contacted us by 'phone and, as he had to visit Swindon as part of his brief, called on us in passing. John is the chairman of an agricultural co-operative in North Island and travels widely on business. During the course of our meeting he amused us with a story of the preceding year when he was in Australia and decided to book a table for dinner at a Melbourne hotel. On telephoning for a reservation he was told, "But you have already booked a table for tonight, Sir". The earlier caller turned out to be another Mr Whitelock, a Canadian businessman from Hamilton, Ontario who, through a family history magazine, we had ourselves tried to contact ... encounters of a superbly circuitous kind, which perhaps also indicate the peripatetic nature of the Whitelock strain.

Before leaving us, John also told how he came to be a "Kiwi" - his grandfather, son of the 1840 Matthew of Cogden Hall, had apparently been given a £5 note and told, "Seek your fortune abroad." Matthew had too many sons for the resources of Grinton, and the youngest was "farmed out" to the Colonies.

Before this fortuitous meeting, however, and continuing our Swaledale journey, we had taken the high road over the fells, via Bellerby, and down into Leyburn, in Wensleydale. Prior study of the *International Genealogical Index* and parish registers had shown us that many Whitelock families once lived in surrounding villages, and we wished to capture the atmosphere of these places: we could for the same reason, however, have continued down Swaledale, for other Whitelock families also once lived in villages like Marrick, Downholme, Hudswell, and Richmond itself. At Brompton-on-Swale the river turns southeast and flows more placidly through the northern part of the Vale of York; here, too, were once many other branches of the family back to Tudor and Elizabethan times at Thirsk, Skipton-on-Swale, Baldersby and Topcliffe - indeed, even as far south as Cundall, just before the rivers Ure and Swale meet to become the Ouse.

The 18th century Court Leet book of the manor of Cundall with Norton-le-Clay contains the following record for 29 August 1761:

*I Promise to Pay to Thos Brown or Wm Lapsley Present Overseers of the Poor or the suckseding Oversears [sic] for the township of Norton in the Clay the sum of Ten Pounds as sown [sic] as*

my daughter Jane or the childe that she is now with all shall become troublesome to the said Township.

John Brockhill

Niklas Semison as witnessed my Hand... signed Wm Whitelock.

At this period in the 18th century, illegitimacy, particularly in rural areas, was considered a mere peccadillo in the hierarchy of sins, for there was not then the social stigma attaching to it in later, more moralistic, Victorian times. For Jane and contemporaries, children born without a prior visit to the altar were relatively frequent. Jane did eventually marry, about 10 years later, not to her nameless seducer, but to a miller, Edward Knowles. Nevertheless, she gave her Whitelock name to two illegitimate sons who passed on the surname to many subsequent generations. It is interesting to reflect how many surnames may have been perpetuated in this way because their female owners were less calculating, or more promiscuous, than they should have been. How many succeeding generations might today have a different surname? A mocking commentary on the importance sometimes attached to name and social status.

Both these names, Whitelock and Knowles, occur very frequently in the broad acres of Yorkshire, but my grandmother, born Elizabeth Whitelock, lived for most of her life in London, far from the dales where her own grandparents had been born. She heard many stories and descriptions of the beauties of Yorkshire in her Victorian youth - perhaps it is from her that I, also a Londoner, derive my fascination with the moors and dales of the White Rose county.

**Author's comments:** Whitelock was a well-known name in Leeds from 1880 when brothers John Lupton Whitelock and Percy Jarvis Whitelock took over the "Turk's Head" in Briggate, renaming it "Whitelocks".

**Reference:** Court Leet book at Leeds District Archives, Sheepscar, Leeds (RD/RP6 folio 45).

## Report from South Africa

by Mark Tapping

The hostilities variously known as the Anglo-Boer War, the Second War of Independence or the South African War of 1899-1902 broke out in October 1899, over 100 years ago. Many events have been or are being organised throughout South Africa to commemorate the centenary. Included are exhibitions, lectures, competitions, tours and even literary and artistic events. There has even been an "Anglo-Boer War Centenary auction sale"! New monuments will be unveiled while there will also be various wreath laying ceremonies. Indeed, the President of the Republic and Britain's Duke of Kent have already taken part in such ceremonies at Brandfort, near Bloemfontein while in November Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II attended various commemorative events and Prince Phillip visited the battle site at Spionkop, near Ladysmith. Here, in January 1900 there was a battle marked by great bravery and inept leadership, in which many good Lancastrians, men from Middlesex, Borderers and others laid down their lives.

While the theme of many of the events centres on a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, the opportunity is being taken to recognise the role and the sufferings of the black people of South Africa in this so-called "white man's war". Depending on their source, figures of casualties vary but it is now thought that some 20,000 blacks died in the war and, at its end, over 100,000 of them were held in the infamous concentration camps.

Among the many new publications suddenly appearing on book-sellers' shelves to mark the centenary is 1899 - *The Long March Home* by Elsabé Brink. This chronicles the remarkable activities of John Sidney Marwick who planned, organised and led an exodus of some 7,000 Zulu workers (unemployed by the gold mines because of the coming hostilities) from the Witwatersrand, through inhospitable territory and Boer lines to safety in Natal. The release of this publication seems to indicate that there is still much to discover about the history of South Africa.

Even in Britain the centenary is not being forgotten. For example, the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol is putting on a special exhibition to mark the event.

# Family Heirloom



This family picture shows Ellen Louisa (née Stedman, born 1878) and James William Wells (born 1880) with their children. Ellen gave birth to three sets of twins (one died at birth) plus three other children. From left to right are Ellen Louisa holding John Walter (twin), behind is James Jasper, then Francis William (twin), James William (father), Charles Frederick (twin), seated Kathleen Mary (surviving twin); behind is Edith Grace then George Albert (twin) seated on Lilian Victoria's lap. Both Ellen and James were born and married in Brighton in Sussex. On leaving the Army Service Corps, James William worked as a carman (forage) and then became a labourer on the Southern Railway. Ellen Louisa died in 1921 leaving the eldest daughter, Lilian to bring up her brothers and sisters. Ellen and James were the maternal grandparents of Ron Jameson, 50 Dale View, Hangleton, Hove, East Sussex BN3 8LB.